



fact sheet

Towing Company Management of Fuel- and Oil-Contaminated Debris from Vehicle Accidents

After a motor vehicle collision, police and transportation agencies – not to mention motorists – want to get normal traffic flowing again as soon as possible. Your towing company may be called upon to perform limited accident scene cleanup of fuel, oil and other automotive fluids before removing the vehicle(s) involved, so the affected roadway can re-open.

Spill Reporting & Cleanup

All spills of fuel or oil need to be cleaned up and should be reported to the local fire department. If a spill originates from a commercial vehicle and appears to be more than ten (10) gallons, it must also be reported to the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP). While spills from passenger vehicle accidents are generally exempt from reporting requirements, they still need to be cleaned up appropriately.

In most cases, towing company employees who respond to an accident call will stabilize the accident scene by using a granular or powdered absorbent material to contain and/or soak up spills on the pavement, shoulder and ground nearby. When most of the spilled fuel or oil cannot be recovered using an absorbent, then a professional hazardous waste cleanup contractor and/or licensed hazardous waste transporter must be hired by the party responsible.

If any fuel remaining in a vehicle storage tank can be used as originally intended, it can be removed as a “virgin product” and is not subject to waste regulations if your company holds a local fire department permit for keeping or storing combustible or flammable liquids where the responding tow truck is garaged.

Managing Contaminated Debris from an Accident

Once debris from an accident scene has been contaminated with fuel, oil, and/or other automotive/vehicle fluids, its cleanup needs to be handled appropriately:

- **Gasoline.** Place absorbents contaminated with gasoline in a separate U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) approved container labeled to indicate its contents (i.e. “Absorbents Contaminated with Waste Fuel”), their associated hazards (e.g. combustible, flammable, toxic), and the date on which the material was initially placed in the container.
- **Diesel or Oil.** Absorbents contaminated with diesel fuel, gear oil, motor oil, hydraulic fluid, transmission fluid, other waste oils, or any combination of these must likewise be placed in a separate DOT-approved container labeled to indicate contents (i.e. “Absorbents Contaminated with Waste Oil”), their associated hazards (e.g. combustible, flammable, toxic), and the date on which the material was initially placed in the container.

IMPORTANT NOTES

To report a fuel or oil spill to MassDEP, call the agency's 24-hour, toll-free notification line:
1-888-304-1133

Your company is responsible for understanding and complying with all local, state and federal hazardous waste cleanup and management requirements, and for training your staff accordingly. Your company may be subject to MassDEP enforcement (which could include significant financial penalties) if it:

- Does not register as a hazardous waste generator and/or as a contractor that self-transportes wastes,
- Fails to notify the appropriate authorities of a spill, or
- Exceeds the waste generation and transportation limits described in this fact sheet.

Massachusetts Department of
Environmental Protection
One Winter Street
Boston, MA 02108-4746

Commonwealth of
Massachusetts
Deval L. Patrick, Governor

Executive Office of
Energy & Environmental Affairs
Richard K. Sullivan Jr.,
Secretary

Department of
Environmental Protection
Kenneth L. Kimmel,
Commissioner

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alternate format by calling our
ADA Coordinator at
(617) 574-6872.

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Your company may collect up to 220 pounds (approximately 27.5 gallons or half of a 55 gallon drum) each of gasoline- and diesel fuel/oil-contaminated absorbent debris from a single accident scene. These are strict limits. If they are exceeded, your company could be subject to MassDEP enforcement action.

Accumulating the different types of debris in separate containers will make it easier for you to properly characterize the wastes you collect and may lower your disposal costs. Any indistinguishable mixture should be handled as gasoline-contaminated debris.

Contaminated Debris Transportation

To transport contaminated debris from an accident scene, your company must be registered with MassDEP as both:

- A generator of hazardous waste and/or waste oil (at your company's property) AND
- A contractor that self-transportes these wastes from accident scenes.

Once you have properly cleaned up and collected all debris from an accident scene, you may transport up to 440 pounds (55 gallons) in a single vehicle to your garage or property. The debris may be placed in one or more containers, each holding no more than 55 gallons. Gasoline- and diesel fuel/oil-contaminated absorbent material must be placed in separate containers. The 440-pound or 55-gallon limit applies to any indistinguishable mixture of debris.

No matter how many accident scenes your tow truck responds to, in one trip or several, once the containers in your truck reach the limit of 440 pounds or 55 gallons, the container(s) must be transported directly to your company's property. There, you will need to off-load and properly store the collected debris, then arrange for its pickup and disposal or recycling by your waste hauler.

You may check on your current hazardous waste generator registration status here:

<http://www.mass.gov/dep/recycle/hazardous/hwgenids.pdf>

If your company is not currently registered with MassDEP to accumulate gasoline- and diesel/oil-contaminated absorbents or other hazardous waste or waste oil on your property, or to transport these materials to your property, you must:

- **(1) Submit a Generator Registration Form or Notification of Hazardous Waste Activity to MassDEP for each facility/property where you accumulate.**

The generator status that you register for will determine how much waste you may accumulate on site at any one time, and how quickly you will need to ship it off-site for proper recycling or disposal. If your company responds to multiple accidents every month, you will probably want to notify as a Small Quantity Generator (SQG) of both hazardous waste and waste oil. Registration forms and instructions are available on MassDEP's web site. (See **More Information** on page 3 for a link to these.)

AND

- **(2) Submit a Generator Registration Form to MassDEP, registering your company as a contractor that transports wastes from accident scenes.** A copy of the Contractor Registration Form should be kept in each of your tow trucks, in case police ask to see it. (See **More Information** on page 3.)

OR

- **Wait at the accident scene for a licensed hazardous waste transporter.** Even if your company is registered as a generator of hazardous waste and/or waste oil with MassDEP, this might be simpler – and less expensive in the long run – than taking responsibility for handling, transporting and accumulating contaminated material on your own. If an accident scene generates more than 220 pounds (27.5 gallons) of gasoline- and/or diesel fuel/oil-contaminated debris, the responsible party must hire a licensed hazardous waste transporter to remove the waste and properly manifest the shipment.

More Information

- Review the following MassDEP web pages:

Hazardous Waste Generation, Accumulation & Labeling
<http://www.mass.gov/dep/recycle/hazardous/generati.htm>

Hazardous Waste Generator Status & Storage Limits
<http://www.mass.gov/dep/recycle/hazardous/hwgens.htm>

Hazardous Waste Generator Registration Forms & Directions
<http://www.mass.gov/dep/recycle/approvals/hwforms.htm#gen>

Policy for Contractors with Hazardous Waste
<http://www.mass.gov/dep/recycle/laws/hwcontra.htm>

• Call the MassDEP Hazardous Waste Compliance Assistance Line: 617-292-5898

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